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Note by the Secretariat on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women

Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/143 of 19 December 2006 as a background for discussion through which to address the issue of violence against women within the framework of the mandates of the Commission for Social Development during its forty-sixth session. As the priority theme of the forty-sixth session of the Commission is "Promoting full employment and decent work for all", this note focuses on the areas of employment and work.

2. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women had been adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, which recognizes that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

3. In its resolution 58/185 of 22 December 2003, the General Assembly mandated an in-depth study on all forms and manifestations of violence against women, demonstrating the great importance that States Members of the United Nations attach to addressing the issue of violence against women. Following the release of the in-depth report of the Secretary-General entitled *Ending Violence against Women: From Words to Action*,[1] the Assembly, in its resolution 61/143 of 19 December 2006, invited, inter alia, the Economic and Social Council and its

* E/CN.5/2008/1.

[1] United Nations publication Sales No. E.06.IV.8.

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functional commissions to discuss, by 2008, within their respective mandates, the question of violence against women in all its forms and manifestations.

The link between discrimination and violence against women

4. Violence against women is a form of discrimination and a violation of human rights that is not confined to a particular culture, region or country, or a particular group of women in a society (see *Ending Violence against Women*). It cuts across all cultural, economic and social differences. Women's lack of economic autonomy in society and in the family often results in other forms of inequalities and discrimination against them. These economic and social inequalities are at the root of the unequal power relations between men and women that underlie all forms of violence against women.

5. General recommendation No. 19 (adopted) by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its eleventh session in 1992,[2] the treaty body monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,[3] explicitly stated that violence against women constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination and that discrimination is a major cause of such violence.

6. Gender-based discrimination in the realm of employment and work is intrinsically linked to violence against women and leads to significant inequalities between the sexes. Lack of equal employment opportunities for women and unequal pay for equal work are two major manifestations of gender-based discrimination in the labour market.

7. Unsafe working conditions and abuse of workers' rights in the workplace are often directly linked to violence against women workers. Women's relatively weak bargaining power also makes them more vulnerable to discrimination and abuses and other forms of violence in the workplace. Discrimination and violence against women are frequently allowed to continue unabated.

8. All forms of violence against women tend to re-enforce discrimination in the labour market. Direct consequences of violence against women include physical and psychological injuries, trauma and stress. These often result in absence from work or reduced productivity, factors that could lead to the loss of employment or become excuses for discriminatory treatment of women workers in general.

9. The link between discrimination in the world of work and violence against women implies that employment policy should be an important component of an integrated strategy to combat violence against women. Addressing gender-based inequalities and discrimination in employment can make a critical contribution towards efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women through the economic empowerment of women.

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[2] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/47/38), chap. I.

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

Promoting full employment and decent work for all: combating the cause of violence against women at its root

10. The promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all necessarily requires the removal of discrimination based on factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability and other socio-economic characteristics. An explicit gender perspective, when incorporated into the policy framework, helps to strengthen the impact of labour-market policies on the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

11. Addressing gender-based discrimination in the area of employment through promoting productive employment and decent work for all, especially for women, will lead to the economic empowerment of women. This will, in turn, help redress the unequal power relations between men and women that lie at the very core of gender-based violence. To some extent, gender-sensitive labour-market policies and measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and removing barriers to women's full and equal participation in productive employment and decent work constitute some of the most potent tools for eliminating all forms of violence against women, by attacking the problem at its root.

12. Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, important progress in the promotion of women's economic rights and independence has been made as a result of national and international actions. Based on the latest data collected by the International Labour Organization (ILO),[4] it has been determined that women's participation in the labour force has maintained an upward trend in all regions of the world except in non-European Union countries of Europe and Central Asian countries. Women's share in total paid employment has increased in all regions of the world, signalling greater economic independence of women. However, progress in reducing the gender gaps in high-status jobs and in pay has been much slower, despite remarkable advances in women's educational achievement. The ILO analysis identifies gender-based discrimination in remuneration as a key determinant of the gender disparity in pay.

13. The *Report on the World Social Situation 2007 (forthcoming)* reviewed four issues that affect the status of women in the world of work: (a) women's participation in the labour force, (b) women's participation in the informal sector, (c) occupational segregation and (d) reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. The report concluded that increased female employment has been paralleled in some countries by deterioration in the terms and conditions of employment in many areas.

14. Specifically, women tend to be overrepresented in the informal sector and self-employment where jobs are lower-paying and less secure. Yet, women are less likely than men to be covered by social security schemes. Horizontal and vertical occupational segregation also continues to hinder the achievement of gender equality in employment. Occupations traditionally engaged in by women pay less than jobs requiring similar skill levels but occupied predominately by men. In

[4] See *International Labour Organization, Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2007). Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: report I (B) of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 96th Session, 2007.

virtually all countries, women are overrepresented in the service sector.[5] Women's traditional role as caregivers also presents great difficulties for them in terms of balancing work and family responsibilities. Policy measures aimed at women (rather than parents or caregivers), however, can reinforce the perception that women are responsible for household work.

15. The greatest disadvantage for women, compared with men, is that they must balance labour-market work with domestic work. All policies should be mindful of the need to support both women and men in their multiple roles and to break the stereotypes of gender roles in order to promote the empowerment of women through equal participation in the labour force. At the same time, policies and measures designed to address the gender pay gap are also urgently needed to eliminate gender-based discrimination in the labour market.

16. As a starting point, gender bias should be eliminated in job evaluation methods to ensure that jobs typically performed by women are given their due value and are remunerated accordingly. Such revaluation of "women's work" will help narrow the gender gap in pay while also contributing to raising the status of women and men performing these jobs, which would strengthen their positions in power relations.

17. Fairness and gender equality, rights, voice and recognition are all important elements of the concept of decent work. Promoting productive employment and decent work for all should therefore be a critical component of an integrated strategy to eliminate all forms of violence against women. This also entails mainstreaming a gender perspective in labour-market and employment policies to maximize their contribution to efforts aimed at eliminating violence against women in all its manifestations.

Policy framework

18. An integrated set of immediate and longer-terms policies is necessary to promote gender equality at the workplace, a prerequisite for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. Some measures and policies have been shown to work. It is necessary to build on past successes and lessons to formulate employment-related policies and strategies that will contribute positively to further intensifying efforts to root out violence against women.

19. In the immediate short run, some needed policy measures can be instituted to address issues of gender inequality in the workplace. They may include:

- Family-friendly measures to help women and men better balance family responsibilities and the demand of work
- Development and adoption of job evaluation methods free of gender biases
- Incorporation of a gender perspective in legislation and regulations aimed at protecting the rights of workers, including migrant workers, so as to prevent abuse of and violence against women workers in the workplace

[5] Anker, Richard, "Occupational segregation: lack of opportunities, inequality and discrimination", paper presented at the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Full Employment and Decent Work, 10-12 October 2006, New York.

- Utilization of gender impact analysis to ensure that social and economic policies, especially those related to employment and work, contribute to the prevention and elimination of violence against women, instead of exacerbating it.

20. In the medium to long term, additional policies should be adopted to promote the economic empowerment of women, thereby contributing to an integrated strategy to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Among the social and economic policy measures that can have a long-term impact on the deep-rooted power imbalances underpinning violence against women are the following, which relate closely to employment, the priority theme of the present session of the Commission for Social Development:

- Enactment of legislation securing women's rights to property, inheritance, credit and social security, among the full range of social and economic rights, so as to empower women and to support entrepreneurship among women
- Assumption and fulfilment of States' responsibility to coordinate and build an integrated strategy to end all forms of violence against women, including comprehensive labour-market policies and regulations aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination in the realm of employment and work
- Education and training programmes to strengthen women's capacity and core labour market skills in order to improve their employability and bargaining ability
- Provision of support to informal sector workers, including social protection coverage, legal protection and voice representation
- Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all employment and labour market-related policies, as well as all other social and economic policies with a bearing on labour-market outcomes, so as to promote gender equality.